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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 6586  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 2594  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 8756  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1760  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 000502

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PACOM FOR FPA HUSO  
OSD FOR BRIGADIER GENERAL TOOLAN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: VISIT TO THAILAND OF OSD ASIA PRINCIPAL DIRECTOR  
BRIGADIER GENERAL JOHN TOOLAN

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

11. (C) Summary. During his meetings with Thai officials, OSD Asia Director Brigadier General Toolan provided Thai military and civilian officials with Washington's perspective on the September 19 coup, underscoring our desire that Thailand rescind martial law and maintain timetables for drafting a new constitution and holding elections. Thai officials emphasized that martial law was not actually being exercised on a day-to-day basis but was necessary to allow the military to quickly respond to situations threatening national security or stability. General Toolan also asked for continued assistance in resettlement for North Korean asylum seekers. Thai National Security Council Secretary General Prakit Prachonpachanuk indicated that Thailand would continue to assist with the current cases of DPRK refugees but cautioned that Thailand has strict immigration laws and does not wish to become a conduit for North Koreans seeking asylum in the United States. MFA officials also asked that the United States keep Thai cooperation on resettlement out of the media. Royal Thai Supreme Command officials believe that present problems between Thailand and Singapore will not affect Thailand's military relations with Singapore. End Summary.

GIVING THE THAI THE WASHINGTON PERSPECTIVE

12. (C) January 20-23 Brigadier General John A. Toolan, Jr., Principal Director for Asia & Pacific Affairs at the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense visited Thailand. In a dinner at the Ambassador's residence, Toolan explained to NSC Secretary General Prakit Prachonpachanuk, LTG Naraset Isrankura of MOD's Office of Planning and LTG Niphat Thonglek, Director of Thailand's Neighboring Country Border Coordination Center, the seriousness with which Washington policy makers view events in Thailand. Toolan and the Ambassador explained our desire that Thailand not let key milestones slip in drafting a new Constitution and holding elections and noted how difficult it is to understand Thailand's continued implementation of martial law. Prakit assured Toolan that the order to rescind martial law in most of the country would be signed by the King "any day now." Naraset went on to explain that martial law in Thailand was far less "dramatic" than it seems to those in the West. He noted that troops are not deployed in public and that martial

law has no impact on everyday life. Naraset said that Thailand needed to have the ability to call in military units to respond to crises like bombings or school burnings since the military has special skills that the police do not. He likened martial law to a fire extinguisher that might not be needed but was necessary insurance to prevent a crisis.

#### RAISING DPRK REFUGEES

13. (C) Drawing on talking points provided in Washington, Toolan expressed to NSC Secretary General Prakrit our appreciation for Thailand's cooperation with the U.S. on the protection and resettlement of North Korean asylum seekers and the importance we place on helping to resettle DPRK refugees in the United States. Toolan asked for continued cooperation with the Thai on this issue and noted that we would likely continue to seek assistance in handling future cases. Prakrit noted how Thailand was working closely with the Embassy on a number of DPRK refugee cases right now but explained that Thailand was being inundated with refugees from Burma, Laos and North Korea. He emphasized that Thailand has strict immigration laws and wishes to avoid becoming a conduit for DPRK refugees transiting through China, Laos or Burma. He gave no indication that Thailand would welcome more North Korean refugees, irrespective of their ultimate destination. On January 23, Toolan made similar points to MFA American and South Pacific Affairs Director General Nongnuth Phetcharatana. Nongnuth echoed Prakrit's concern that Thailand not become a magnet for North Koreans and added that, irrespective of what happens, Thailand would like to keep its cooperation out of the media so as to avoid stirring up domestic criticism from Thai who believe the money the RTG spends to care for refugees would be better spent caring for poor Thai.

BANGKOK 00000502 002 OF 003

#### COUNTER TERRORISM COOPERATION

14. (C) General Toolan toured the Thai Counter Terrorist Operations Center (CTOC) under the command of LTG Tanasak Patimapragorn. Tanasak explained the importance of U.S. training and equipment to enable the Thai to set up an interagency planning and operations center and terrorism response force. Tanasak appreciated State Department and DOD sponsored courses that had helped his unit improve its ability to respond to IEDs, conventional or WMD attacks. He told General Toolan that he understood why U.S. coup sanctions had suspended the delivery of vests, weapons and communications gear for a Thai counter terrorism team but appreciated continued U.S. assistance in training Thai to counter IEDs and other threats. Tanasak noted the new streamlined authority under which CTOC will operate in the future. In normal times, CTOC is under the direct control of the Royal Thai Supreme Commander. However, once the NSC Secretary General declares a crisis a terrorist incident,

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CTOC will fall under the direct command of the Prime Minister and be allowed to control directly special police and military units. This authority, coupled with a modernized command center, will, in Tanasak's view, allow Thailand to respond more effectively to terrorist incidents.

#### ROYAL THAI SUPREME COMMAND

15. (C) General Songkitti Jaggabbatara, Chief of Joint Staff at Royal Thai Supreme Command, explained to General Toolan the Thai military's desire to maintain close relations with the United States during the period in which many military programs are suspended in response to the coup. In response to General Toolan's briefing on U.S. concern over civil liberties and a quick return to an elected government, Songkitti explained that Thailand, unlike Malaysia or Singapore, does not have an Internal Security Act which could allow the military to respond immediately to a domestic

emergency. Absent such an Act, which Songkitti believes might be enacted in a few months once the expanded interagency Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) is fully functional, the only legal mechanism Thailand has to permit the military to use its capabilities to respond to violence is martial law. Songkitti repeated the points Naraset had made that martial law in Thailand should not be interpreted as having armed soldiers on every street corner. Songkitti also told Toolan that the present row with Singapore over former PM Thaksin Shinawatra's meetings there will not hurt Thai-Singapore military relations. Songkitti said that Singapore will participate in Cope Tiger and plans to participate in Cobra Gold. Songkitti also told Toolan that he intends to meet with UN officials in New York in late January to discuss PKO operations. While in the United States, Songkitti hopes to visit CENTCOM in Tampa to discuss U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and meet with the Thai military liaison officer attached to CENTCOM.

#### THE FOREIGN MINISTRY

¶6. (C) DG Nongnuth at MFA noted the importance of continued U.S. military engagement in Thailand and Southeast Asia, saying that American influence was needed to counter growing influence from "other regional powers." Nongnuth predicted that the Constitutional Drafting Committee will draw up a new Constitution within six months and that the Thai electorate will endorse it shortly thereafter. She also expressed confidence that an open general election will be held once the new Constitution is in place. Nongnuth noted the symbolic importance of the Cobra Gold exercise, mentioning how U.S., Thai, Japanese, Indonesian and Singaporean cooperation in the exercise was good for the entire region. She told General Toolan that the RTG hopes Washington will agree to permit the exercise to proceed. Turning to the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), Nongnuth reiterated the Thai position that Thailand will endorse PSI once Malaysia and Indonesia do, but asked the United States to help educate Thai agencies on what PSI means. She specifically asked that Thai agencies be invited to attend PSI seminars or workshops as observers.

BANGKOK 00000502 003 OF 003

#### TOUR OF STRATEGIC FACILITIES

¶7. (C) Brigadier General Toolan also toured key Thai port facilities. At Utapao Naval Air Station, he was briefed on how that facility was vitally important to making Operation Unified Assistance a success and is presently used more than 70 times per month to support U.S. aircraft including planes moving to and from Afghanistan and Iraq. Recently, PACOM designated Utapao as the most important Cooperative Security Location (CSL) in the Asia-Pacific region. At Sattahip Naval Base, he toured Thai facilities used by the USN during our annual CARAT exercise. At Laem Chabang commercial port, he saw the berthing facilities where the U.S. aircraft carriers USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Kitty Hawk docked during ship visits in 2006, and at Samaesan he toured the U.S. constructed facility used by Thai and U.S. SEALs for counter terrorism and special operations exercises in the Gulf of Thailand.

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